

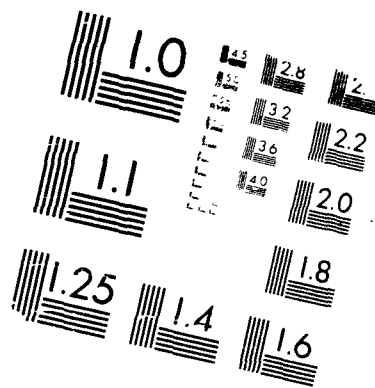
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STUDENT REPORT

AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES
(AFSOF); HOW DID WE DECIDE WHAT WAS
ENOUGH?

Major Bradley S. Baker

88-0170

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HOW DID WE DECIDE WHAT WAS ENOUGH?

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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE
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<p>In 1981, Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) were inadequate to meet the modern threat. Consequently, the Military Departments were directed to "revitalize" their respective Special Operations Forces. This article documents the Air Force's efforts to improve AFSOF capabilities by reviewing the events which led to the creation of the first AFSOF Master Plan in 1984, its subsequent update in 1986, and the development of the FY88-92 AFSOF force structure.</p>				
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PREFACE

The purpose of this article is to document, from an action officer's point of view, the events which ultimately led to the Air Force Special Operations (AFSOF) force structure as it appears in the 1988-1992 Five Year Defense Program. The article is developed chronologically beginning with the 1983 DoD guidance to "revitalize" our Special Operations Forces, and ending with the 1986 Secretary of Defense approval of a greatly increased and enhanced AFSOF force structure. This document highlights the tremendous and honest effort expended by so many people to develop a program which will give this nation a credible AFSOF capability.

ACSC/EDC approved early submission of this article to Airlift magazine to accommodate the magazine's publication deadline. Any deviation from standard Air University format was dictated by Airlift magazine requirements

I wish to thank Major Michael McCarthy of HQ MAC/XPPB for his assistance in editing text and verifying sources. In addition, I deeply appreciate the editing assistance provided by my faculty advisor, Major James Connors.

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—ABOUT THE AUTHOR—

Major Bradley S. Baker served as the long-range AFSOF force structure planning officer in the Directorate of Programming and Policy, DCS Plans, HQ MAC, Scott AFB, IL. While at HQ MAC, he was the point-of-contact for the AFSOF Master Plan and was a regular lecturer at the Airlift Operations School on that subject. In addition, he was the primary HQ MAC team member responsible for updating the 1984 AFSOF Master Plan and developing the current AFSOF force structure. Major Baker has also served as a C-141 aircraft commander, CT-39 and C-21 flight examiner, and as the Assistant Training officer for the 375th Aeromedical Airlift Wing. He is a distinguished graduate from SOS and a 1987 graduate of Airlift Operations School.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Part of our College mission is distribution of the students' problem solving products to DoD sponsors and other interested agencies to enhance insight into contemporary, defense related issues. While the College has accepted this product as meeting academic requirements for graduation, the views and opinions expressed or implied are solely those of the author and should not be construed as carrying official sanction.

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REPORT NUMBER 88-0170

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR BRADLEY S. BAKER, USAF

TITLE AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES (AFSOF); HOW DID WE DECIDE WHAT WAS ENOUGH?

I. Purpose: Document the events leading to the development of the Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) force structure as approved in the 1988-1992 Five Year Defense Program (FYDP).

II. Synopsis: To alleviate shortfalls in our AFSOF capabilities Deputy Secretary of Defense (DepSecDef), Paul Thayer directed the Services to "revitalize" their Special Operations Forces and create time-phased master plans for this purpose. The Air Force's plan called for a number of force structure improvements to include building and modifying more MC-130s, HH-53s, and AC-130s. It also recommended buying 76 CV-22 aircraft to satisfy the theater CINCs' preference to employ troops via vertical lift. In addition, the plan detailed numerous other measures for improving or enhancing maintenance and operations. The milestones depicted in the plan were fiscally unconstrained and did not consider the Air Force budgeting process. Unfortunately, Congress and other supporters of AFSOF viewed these milestones as mandatory completion dates. Consequently, when the Air Force did not complete a project by the plan's ideal date, we were criticized for failing to

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"revitalize" AFSOF. In Fiscal Year (FY) 1986, Congress showed their displeasure by freezing funds for the MC-130 Combat Talon II and MH-53 Pave Low-enhanced programs until we came up with a new plan for satisfying SOF airlift requirements.

Meanwhile, another topic was drawing congressional interest; Joint Force Development Initiative 17. This initiative stated the Army would assume responsibility for all rotary wing SOF missions, but Congress did not agree with this plan. Consequently, they have effectively laid the subject to rest by funding the modification of all Air Force H-53 helicopters into the MH-53 Pave Low configuration.

As a consequence of the high-level interest in SOF, Secretary Weinberger directed the Services to develop plans for meeting DoD SOF objectives in the current FYDP and updating their original master plans by 31 July 1986. We began this process in January 1986 by visiting all the theater CINCs' planning staffs and discussing their SOF requirements for contingency and wartime operations. Once we completed our visits, DepSecDef Taft gave us two working days to develop a force structure with associated cost. Our two-day crash effort resulted in a force which considerably increased the number of all AFSOF aircraft. We estimated the cost of our proposal to be \$3.5 billion dollars over the FYDP, effectively doubling the current AFSOF budget.

In light of budget constraints, the Defense Resources Board directed the Principle Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to look for alternatives to the large force suggested by DepSecDef Taft. The final result of this review was Secretary Weinberger's approval of the force shown below:

TABLE 1

SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXPANSIONS

38	MC-130E/H *	22	AC-130H/U
41	MH-53	6	CV-22 **
17	MH-47 (Army)	31	HC-130 (dedicated)
13	C-141 SOLL	11	C-130 SOLL

* 14 MC-130Es will serve as both tankers and Talons.

** AF has programmed a total buy of 55 CV-22s
Six are funded in the FY88-92 FYDP.

CONTINUED

This new force was based upon four key assumptions. First, we would not simultaneously support all five theater CINCs. Second, we would dual-role the MC-130Es as both penetrating tankers and Talons. Third, we would not place AC-130Hs in the Air Force Reserve. Fourth, both the Air Force and Army would modify aircraft to support the long-range rotary wing mission. With all these assumptions, we must consider several issues. First, by reducing the number of aircraft and placing others in a dual-role, basing becomes the key to insuring the right CINC is supported by the right aircraft in a timely fashion. Secondly, we must carefully evaluate any attempt at placing AC-130s in the AF Reserve since the number is based upon keeping all 22 in the active force. Finally, we must insure any attempt at implementing Initiative 17 is done so with a clear plan for deciding who does what, for whom?

III. Conclusion: Despite criticism from some SOF supporters, the Air Force is doing a respectable job of "revitalizing" its AFSOF. By FY92 we should have almost three times the number of Talons we have today, five times as many MH-53s, 12 new AC-130s, 13 specially modified C-141 SOLL (Special Operations Low-Level) aircraft as well as 11 C-130 SOLL aircraft. However, the Air Force is facing serious budget reductions and we can expect to see some reduction in AFSOF funding. If this occurs, our leaders must be careful to insure the funds they remove will not destroy our ability to reach the FY92 AFSOF goals.

**AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES (AFSOF);
HOW DID WE DECIDE WHAT WAS ENOUGH?**

... in 1981, our Special Operations Forces [SOF] were in a debilitated state. After a decade of neglect, force structure had dwindled to dangerously low levels, units were ill-equipped and ill-prepared to meet their commitments, and the vital contribution these forces make to our national security was poorly understood.... Our SOF revitalization effort was structured to avoid sacrificing quality for quantity and to lay a solid foundation for long-term force sustainment. This measured approach, spanning the decade of the 1980s, has resulted in substantial improvements and remains on track. (1:293-294)

This statement from Secretary of Defense Weinberger's Annual Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1988 highlights the emphasis DoD is now placing upon our Special Operations Forces. However, this was not always the case.

In Fiscal Year 1981, shortly after we attempted to rescue American hostages from Tehran, we had only 14 MC-130E "Combat Talon I's", 9 HH-53 "Pave Low" helicopters and 10 AC-130H Spectre gunships in our active Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) inventory. (1:Chart III.I.6) Unfortunately, it was not until October 1983 that then Deputy Secretary of Defense (DepSecDef) Paul Thayer issued a memo to the Secretaries of the Military Departments, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Directors of the Defense Agencies which stated: "US national security requires the maintenance of Special Operations Forces (SOF) capable of conducting the full range of special operations on a worldwide basis, and the revitalization of those forces must be pursued as a matter of national urgency." (2:1) This same memo directed the military departments to submit

"a time-phased plan" to the Principle Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) (OSD/ISA) by 31 March 1984 (2:2).

This translated into a herculean task for the action officers in the military departments, especially the Air Force. In less than six months they had to request detailed requirements from all the theater CINCs as well as other users of SOF, compile those requirements and then translate them into number and type of aircraft needed to meet the overall requirement. Once this was completed, the team then had to identify all areas required to support a proposed force structure to include personnel, training, support equipment, communications, logistics, and operations. Finally, all of this information had to be assembled in a coherent, time-phased plan for submission to OSD/ISA by 31 March 1984. To meet this deadline and still allow time for product coordination at the Air Staff and CINCs' level meant the action officers had to complete a draft master plan no later than 1 January 1984. This would not be the last time an unrealistic time schedule would impact AFSOF force structure development. The Air Force forwarded its plan to the Secretary of the Air Force in late March and he signed it on 4 April 1984. The 1984 AFSOF Master Plan marked a milestone in the history of AFSOF force structure development. For the first time we had a concise document which attempted to consolidate AFSOF requirements with a plan for their accomplishment.

Since the primary purpose of this article is to detail the evolution of our currently approved force structure, I will not delve in depth into the contents of the 1984 AFSOF Master Plan. However, you should know the original plan detailed numerous actions needed to improve our AFSOF capabilities. The plan also assigned specific milestones by fiscal quarter to many of these suggested improvements. It was these milestones which would later raise questions about the Air Force's sincerity in "revitalizing" AFSOF.

The original Master Plan called for a number of force structure improvements to include building or modifying more MC-130s, HH-53s, and AC-130s. In addition, it recommended a buy of 76 new technology CV-22 Osprey aircraft to satisfy the users' preferred method of employment--vertical lift. (3:3-16) (Note: The CV-22, formerly designated the JVX, is the Air Force designation for the V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft currently under development by the US Marine Corps.) The first plan relied primarily upon on-going programs rather than suggesting new or dramatically increased programs. The focus was on improving the capabilities and maintainability of current aircraft rather than a quantum leap in the size of the force structure.

Even before the ink was dry on the first AFSOF Master Plan, the first major challenge appeared. In May 1984 the Chief of Staff of the Army (General Wickham) and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (General Gabriel) agreed to implement 31 Joint Force Development Initiatives. Initiative 17 simply stated "The Air Force will transfer the responsibility for providing

rotary wing lift support for SOF to the Army." (4:111) On the surface this action may have seemed quite logical since the Army had thousands of helicopters and the Air Force had only 9 HH-53 Pave Lows supporting primarily Army special forces units. However, closer examination of the facts showed there were several flaws in this logic. First, while the Army did have a sizable fleet of helicopters, they did not have any capable of aerial refueling or night, adverse weather, low-level operations in hostile territory. In fact, the Air Force's HH-53H Pave Lows were the only assets with this capability. You may then ask, why didn't we just transfer our 9 Pave Lows to the Army? This was considered, but the Army did not have H-53s in its inventory nor any of the sophisticated electronics on the Pave Lows. (4:75) Consequently, with no logistic network the Army would find maintainability difficult at best. In addition, where would the pilots come from? The only trained Pave Low pilots were in the Air Force. Still another factor was DoD's overriding concern that we not lose capability while attempting to implement Initiative 17.

In light of these many problems, a policy of gradual transfer of the SOF rotary wing mission emerged. The Army now wished to develop a SOF derivative from its venerable and sizable CH-47 Chinook fleet, designating it the MH-47E. An entire article could be written on this subject alone, however for our purposes we can suffice to say, although Initiative 17 has never been officially withdrawn or implemented it has been effectively by-passed through Congressional funding of 41

Air Force MH-53 Pave Lows. (Note: In 1986 the Air Force redesignated the HH-53 to MH-53 to be consistent with AFSOF designations.) (5:3987) This meant we now had funding to modify the entire fleet of Air Force H-53 helicopters into Pave Lows. In addition, the 1986 House Appropriations Committee Report on the FY 87 DoD Budget stated:

... the Department [of Defense] admits that it [implementing Initiative 17] would cost an additional \$600,000,000 over the next five years. Moreover the Department also admits that either the Army or the Air Force proposal [to meet SOF rotary wing requirements] would meet the requirements of the CINCs. Consequently, the [House Appropriations] Committee is directing that Initiative 17, or any other current or future proposal to transfer any of the Special Forces rotary wing mission from the Air Force to the Army, not be implemented and that no funds are included in this [appropriations] bill for such a purpose. (6:21-22)

As this quote indicates, Congress was becoming more involved with the military departments' attempts to "revitalize" SOF. Congressional committees were constantly requesting senior Air Force leaders from all areas to testify on the Air Force's progress (or lack of progress) on "revitalizing" AFSOF. In fact, the Air Force was singled out in a letter to Senator Cohen (R-ME) from former Principle Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), Mr Noel Koch, as having resisted "revitalization" of SOF at every turn. (7:2) Unfortunately, many critical of the Air Force progress, including Mr Koch, apparently did not understand two very important concepts. First, while it may have appeared to the layman that the Air Force was not adhering to its own timetable set forth in the 1984 AFSOF Master Plan, this was not entirely

true. The Master Plan was strictly designed as a planning, not a programming, document. Consequently, the plan's timetables were only suggestions which did not consider fiscal realities. Suggested AFSOF improvements still had to compete for funding in the normal DoD budgeting process as stated by the CSAF and Secretary of the Air Force on the first page of the Master Plan. Secondly, the Air Force is responsible for supporting SOF with aircraft using highly sophisticated electronics often on the leading edge of technology. As a result, we cannot produce aircraft and qualified crews overnight. In most cases it takes years of research and development, testing, manufacturing, and training to produce a fleet of new and improved operational aircraft. Throwing more money at the "problem" may not reduce the time required to bring a new system on-line. In reality, trying to accelerate programs has historically led to a piecemeal approach to obtaining equipment which ultimately resulted in a logistical nightmare. Attempting to maintain a fleet of airplanes with little commonality of systems will try the soul of any logistician or commander.

All of this interest and misunderstanding manifested itself in the form of the FY86 DoD Authorization Act. In December 1985, Congress passed section 152 of the FY86 DoD Authorization Act which stated:

None of the funds appropriated pursuant to authorization in this title may be obligated or expended for the procurement of MC-130 aircraft or the modification of HH-53 or CH-47 helicopters until the Secretary of Defense-

(1) submits, in consultation with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, to the Committees on Armed

Services of the Senate and House of Representatives a plan for meeting the immediate airlift requirements of the Joint Special Operations Command and a second plan for meeting, by 1991, the airlift requirements of the Joint Special Operations Command and the special operations forces [sic] of the unified commanders-in-chief: and
(2) certifies that the plans required by paragraph (1) are funded in the Fiscal Year 1987 Five Year Defense Plan [sic] (FYDP). (8:605)

As a result of this legislation, Secretary Weinberger issued a 31 January 1986 memo to each of the military department secretaries tasking them to "submit, by 31 March 1986, an interim report detailing the steps it will take to meet Department of Defense [SOF] objectives in the current FYDP. The final updated SOF Master plans will be submitted by 31 July 1986." (9) In anticipation of this memo and an earlier directive from the CSA and CSAF to update SOF airlift requirements, personnel from HQ USAF, HQ MAC, HQ DA (Army), Joint Special Operations Agency, and 23 AF began visiting the unified CINCs' headquarters in mid-January. The baseline for developing AFSOF forces was the programmed FY91 Army and Navy SOF. In addition we were told the CSAF directed we compute our long range helicopter requirements in MH-53/MH-47 equivalents. This indicated the Army was planning to submit their master plan with provisions for implementing Initiative 17 despite the fact DepSecDef Taft had stated in September 1985 that the Army would do only the short-range mission while the Air Force would do the long-range rotary wing SOF mission. (10:2) Our specific task was to take the users' requirements expressed in target distances, number of personnel to be infiltrated/exfiltrated,

and length of time between infiltration and exfiltration or resupply periods. Using this information, we determined what type of aircraft could be used to support a particular mission, how many aircraft a user would need to meet his requirements over a given period, and what special capability, if any, was required on the chosen airframe. Unfortunately, time was not on our side.

Even before we visited all of the SOF users, we began to receive subtle pressures to expedite our requirements review and subsequent force structure development. The primary source of pressure emanated from OSD personnel. We finished our last requirements visit on 7 March 1986 and by Monday, 10 March 1986 DepSecDef Taft sent a memo to the Air Force stating "... I would like by noon on Friday, March 14, a summary of the airlift needed both for the JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command] and the CINCs. At the same time please provide me with a summary of procurement and operating costs... as well as FYDP-level [Five Year Defense Program] detail for the costs of the programs." (11) By the time we received the tasking at the action officer level, we had less than 48 hours to develop a force structure and complete a cost analysis--a task even Superman would find challenging.

As a result of our two-day crash effort, we developed a force which called for dramatic increases in the numbers of all AFSOF aircraft to include enhancing C-141 and C-130 aircraft for the Special Operations Low-Level (SOLL) mission. We estimated the cost of this force to be approximately 3.5 billion dollars

over the next five years; effectively doubling the total funds previously programed for AFSOF. Understandably, this was a difficult pill to swallow for DoD leaders already wrestling with reduced budgets and the prospect of further drastic cuts. Nevertheless, on 31 March 86, the Air Force proposed force structure and the Army's alternate helicopter proposal were presented to Secretary Weinberger during a Secretary's Performance Review. As a result, DepSecDef Taft sent a letter to the chairmen of both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees in accordance with Section 152. Mr Taft proposed a force structure to satisfy SOF airlift requirements and certified that funding was available in the FY87-91 FYDP to build this force. Two things in his letter surprised the action officers. First, while the Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff and Service Secretaries had certified to Mr Taft that either the MH-47 or MH-53 could do the long range rotary wing mission, we understood they had not made a specific airframe recommendation. Mr Taft apparently made the decision to build MH-47s vice MH-53s even though this was contrary to his own previous decision to split the mission responsibilities. Second, we were surprised to see the certification that funding was available in the FY87-91 FYDP since DoD had sent its FY87-91 FYDP budget proposal to Congress months earlier with no request for additional SOF force structure funding. In fact, DoD was deeply involved with trying to develop the FY88-92 FYDP at the time of this letter. It appeared Representatives Daniel (D-VA, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Readiness) and Hutto (D-FL, Chairman of the

Special Operations Panel) were also surprised. They co-signed a 10 April 1986 letter to DepSecDef Taft which expressed their concern over the content of his report by saying "analysis and evaluation leading to the content of the accompanying "Report" is singularly lacking." (12)

In the meantime, back at MAC headquarters, we were trying to write and coordinate a comprehensive plan to support Mr Taft's proposed force structure. We were given additional guidance to explore alternatives to the Taft proposed force using the same ground rules (i.e. simultaneous support of all five CINCs). During the next couple of months, we looked at several alternatives to include the possibility of modifying our rescue HC-130s into penetrating tankers rather than modifying our current Talon fleet and then having to replace them with new Combat Talon IIs. We even looked at reducing the number of gunships required from 32 to 22 by not replacing the retiring AC-130As in the AF Reserve with our Current AC-130Hs. We felt by keeping all gunships in the active force we could better meet wartime, and more importantly, contingency response requirements with fewer new aircraft and gain the ability to forward base gunships in the theaters. As we saw it, if the Reserve forces had to meet contingency response requirements it would dictate such a large number of Air Reserve Technicians that we would lose the cost savings associated with the AF Reserve, as well as, limit our basing options.

In July 1986, the Defense Resources Board (NOTE: The DRB consists of most high-ranking DoD personnel including: SecDef,

DepSecDef, Service Secretaries, Joint Chiefs and Unified and Specified CINCs) reviewed the proposed SOF force structure. They were obviously concerned with the ability to fund such a large growth of SOF force structure. Therefore, they directed the Principle Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) (OSD/ISA) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to seek alternatives to satisfying SOF requirements.

In early September 1986, a team from OSD/ISA and the Joint Staff visited Headquarters MAC to get our ideas on how to reduce the size of the forces in the Taft proposal. In fact the team had already developed a draft plan for reducing force structure by changing the number of simultaneously supported CINCs. Although the most demanding regional scenarios were used for computing each CINC's individual theater needs, this new approach permitted using one set of AFSOF assets to support more than one theater. By using this approach, we could also identify the point where increased spending on force structure did not give us a significant increase in capability. In addition, we suggested they look at our idea of reducing the number of gunships, with which they quickly agreed. Hence, on 31 October 1986, the OSD/ISA team presented DepSecDef Taft with a new proposed force structure based upon reducing the number of simultaneously supported CINCs. This proposal was ultimately approved by Secretary Weinberger and appeared in his Annual Report to the Congress Fiscal Year 1988. In this report he showed the following FY92 SOF force structure:

TABLE 1

SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXPANSION

38	MC-130E/H *	22	AC-130H/U
41	MH-53	6	CV-22 **
17	MH-47 (Army)	31	HC-130 (dedicated)
13	C-141 SOLL	11	C-130 SOLL

* 14 MC-130E will be modified as penetrating tankers and serve as both tankers and Talons.

** AF has programmed a total buy of 55 CV-22s with deliveries beginning in 1994. Six are funded in the FY88-92 FYDP. (1:Chart III.I.6)

With the formal adoption of this force structure, three significant issues still remain. First, by placing the 14 MC-130Es in a dual role as both a penetrating tanker and Combat Talon, basing will become crucial to insuring these assets are positioned to support the right CINC with the right aircraft. Second, with the Air Force and Army building Pave Low aircraft, command and control and mission responsibility may become even more clouded--who does what, with whom? Finally, since we will only have 22 gunships, is it best to leave them all in the active force or give some to the AF Reserve? Like the Talons, the key to making this increased force structure viable is proper basing.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, you are now a believer in the Air Force's commitment to "revitalizing" AFSOF. For those of you who are still skeptical, let's take one last look at the facts. By FY92 we should have almost three times the Talons we have today, five times as many MH-53s, 12 new AC-130s, 13 specially modified

C-141 SOLL, and 11 C-130 SOLL aircraft, (1:295) not to mention the tremendous increase in our ability to maintain and support our AFSOF fleet. Even more amazing, this is happening at a time when almost every other Air Force program is undergoing serious budget reductions. To be dollar specific, DoD has programmed "a total of \$6.8 billion for SOF airlift enhancements, new aircraft, and systems upgrades" for the FY88-92 period. (1:296) With this type of financing and high level support, AFSOF is headed for a long overdue "revitalization." However, I would be naive if I said we are over all of the budget hurdles. The Air Force faces some of the toughest belt tightening measures in its history. Many programs will suffer, and some will not survive. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to vacillate on our commitment. Any necessary budget cuts in AFSOF programs must be done with the skill of a surgeon. Our Air Force leadership, like the surgeon, must perform their task with an ultimate plan for the complete and speedy recovery of the patient, not just the removal of a vital organ. By approaching the difficult years ahead with this in mind, we can still have the timely development of the forces we need to conduct operations such as Desert One and meet the challenges of the future.

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12. US Government: US House of Representatives. Personal letter from Representatives Dan Daniel and Earl Hutto to William Howard Taft IV. Washington DC, 10 April 1986.

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